

Steve Y. Kim

✉ kimsy@uchicago.edu ☎ 248-525-2993 🌐 stevekimphd.com

Placement Director: Steven Durlauf sdurlauf@uchicago.edu
Administrative Director: Nichole Horn nhorn@uchicago.edu

Education

University of Chicago *2020 – 2026 (expected)*
Ph.D. in Public Policy

- Fields: Political Economy, Development

Washington University in St. Louis *2013 – 2017*
B.A. in Economics and Political Science

References

Prof. James A. Robinson (Chair) University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy, Department of Political Science jamesrobinson@uchicago.edu	Prof. Konstantin Sonin University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy ksonin@uchicago.edu
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Prof. Steven N. Durlauf
University of Chicago
Harris School of Public Policy
sdurlauf@uchicago.edu

Job Market Paper

Political Foundations of Developmental States

Contemporary research on East Asia's economic transformation in the postwar era has demonstrated the critical role of the state in driving economic development. Yet it has failed to articulate why such developmental states emerged in East Asia and what political conditions enable or compel a state to adopt developmental policies. In this paper, I present a model of developmental states as political actors and establish a novel causal link from regime type to policy choice to economic growth. A highly democratic regime produces an idle state, politically constrained from distortionary yet pro-growth interventions in the economy. An overly autocratic regime produces a predatory state, politically compelled toward interventions that are maximally extractive and stymie growth. An intermediate regime that is moderately democratic or autocratic enables growth-enhancing interventions while curbing purely extractive interventions.

Working Papers

Does Democracy Build State Capacity?

The existence of a state capable of public goods provision cannot be taken for granted. For many low and middle-income economies today, such capacity is absent or in short supply. While some argue that narrow political representation is optimal for building state capacity, which subsequently enables economic growth, some point to a broad distribution of political power as key to long run state development. This paper develops a framework that integrates the two arguments and finds that the optimal breadth of political representation for state capacity growth widens at later stages of state capacity growth.

Works in Progress

Capital, Labor, and the Moral Invisible Hand

This project challenges the traditional Marxist framework of technological determinism, which posits that the “material forces of production” unilaterally dictate capital-labor relations. I develop a dualist (idealist as well as materialist) model where technology and ideology affect each other to jointly determine economic outcomes. In the model, capital-friendly and labor-friendly “cultural entrepreneurs” compete to shape the societal norms regulating the labor market. A central finding of the model is that capital and labor may occasionally “cooperate” to shift values (e.g. increasing material aspirations) even if they disagree on the ultimate stopping point. The project concludes that the impact of technological development on labor is not fixed. Rather, it is contingent on the level of alignment between the pace of technological development and the society’s moral and ideological landscape.

Welfare Benefits of Patrimonial Politics

Patrimonialism is a form of governance in which public office is used by a patron to distribute benefits to their clients. Conventional wisdom states that patrimonial practices are at the root of “underdevelopment” across the Global South. States in South India such as Kerala and Tamil Nadu show, however, patrimonial politics can facilitate public goods provision and improve social welfare. In this paper, I develop a model of electoral competition and public goods provision and examine the conditions under which patrimonial practices produce welfare gains. When government revenue is low and patrimonial expectations are high (i.e. patrons in public office are expected to deliver substantial benefits to their clients), public goods provision collapses. When government revenue is sufficient to provide a baseline of public goods and can withstand patrimonial pressure, the political legitimacy of patrimonial practices enables the selective provision of public goods that would otherwise be entirely absent.

Teaching Experience

Instructor

- Political Economy of Development Winter 2024
- Math Camp (PhD) Fall 2023

TA

- Game Theory Fall 2022
- Applied Econometrics (PhD) Fall 2021, Fall 2022
- Machine Learning Spring 2022, Spring 2023, Winter 2025
- Principles of Microeconomics Winter 2026

Seminars

- University of Chicago & University of Illinois at Chicago Oct 2024
- Washington University in St. Louis Jan 2026

Miscellaneous

Languages: English, Korean

Programming: Python, R

US Permanent Resident